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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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†"Bird in Hand" opened Monday, October 19th, at the Morosco Theatre.
†"The Time, the Place and the Girl" opened Wednesday, October 21st, at the Mansfield Theatre.
†"The Damask Cheek" opened Thursday, October 22nd, at the Playhouse Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

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"The Damask Cheek"

NEW YORK TIMES
October 23, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"The Damask Cheek"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BEING a-weary of the haggard roles for the moment, Flora Robson is playing a light one in "The Damask Cheek," which was put on at The Playhouse last evening. John van Druten, the neat-fingered playwright, and Lloyd Morris, the learned critic and pedagogue, have spun out a comedy about the course of true love in 1909. "Life With Father" goes farther back than that and is broader and more popular in style. But "The Damask Cheek" also draws considerable amusement out of the fact that manners were more rigid and ridiculous before the rest of us put things in the sensible order that we have established today.

• • •

Nearly everyone in The Playhouse last evening seemed to be very happy about this pleasant-tempered excursion into polite comedy. For there is obviously a good deal to admire about the taste of the acting and production and the silken style of the writing, especially in the beginning when Mr. van Druten and Mr. Morris are making their departure from today. But this department is bound to confess that it regards the materials of "The Damask Cheek" as notably light even for a play that is making a virtue of lightness. By the time of the last act the inconsequential has vanished into nothingness.

In the cold print of 1942, Jimmy Randall of a proud New York family of 1909 finds himself engaged to an actress, in the scandalous year when "The Easiest Way" is shocking the town. He is secretly loved by Rhoda Meldrum from England, the sort of young lady whom men regard as a good sport. How to get Jimmy pulled loose from the actress and how to open his eyes to the virtues of Rhoda is the problem the authors have set themselves.

• • •

It involves a number of amusing domestic crises, some antimacassar conventions, some decorous philandering on the sly and a couple of fish-wife brawls. Since Margaret Douglass is playing the part of the Randall matriarch, the domestic crises have the edge of good period comedy. For Miss Douglass is a born comedienne whose petulancies are humorous and whose sharpness of manners goes under the immaculate surface of the lines.

Miss Robson is playing the part of Rhoda, who is born to love unseen. A remarkable actress, Miss Robson plays the part with enormous craft, to say nothing of a very winning personality that makes friends easily. It is a pleasure to see a part played by some one who understands how to create it. But there is not much use pretending that Miss Robson's style is skimming enough for this kind of acting. The weight of her step in a comic scene is more than this gossamer joint-piece can support.

• • •

As Jimmy, the muddler of the passions, the authors offer Myron McCormick, who gives a dry-humored performance that is highly enjoyable. Celeste Holm is playing the dissembling actress with grace and guile in the best performance she has given here in recent seasons. Zachary Scott is the semi-professional heart-breaker in a bit of skillful acting. As two adolescents, not too distantly related to the progeny of "Life With Father," Peter Fernandez is capital and Joan Tetzel is immense. Ruth Vivian contributes a rippling character portait as a prolix person of respectable though intermediate social station.

As his own stage director Mr. van Druten has contrived a buoyant performance that appreciates the humors of outmoded manners without violating them. Raymond Sovey has designed an attractive living room and costumes that have a positive value in the theatre. The point of view of "The Damask Cheek" is a refreshing one in a day when audiences appreciate a holiday from reality.

Although it is easy to sympathize with Miss Robson's desire to play comedy, it is hard to agree that she is at her best in a part of shy and subtle temperament. Or, finally, that "The Damask Cheek" has material enough to bear out the promise of its sapient point of view.

'THE DAMASK CHEEK'

A comedy in three acts, by John Van Druten and Lloyd Morris; staged by Mr. Van Druten; settings and costumes by Raymond Sovey; presented at the Playhouse on October 22, 1942, by Dwight Deere Wiman. The cast:

Rhoda Meldrum	Flora Robson
Miss Pinner	Ruth Vivian
Mrs. Randall	Margaret Douglass
Nora	Mary Michael
Daphne Randall	Joan Tetzel
Jimmy Randall	Myron McCormick
Calla Longstreth	Celeste Holm
Michael Randall	Peter Fernandez
Neil Harding	Zachary Scott

NEW YORK POST
October 23, 1942

"The Damask Cheek" Stars Flora Robson at the Playhouse

By WILELLA WALDORF

LITERACY, old-fashioned charm and theatrical competence returned to the Broadway stage last night with Dwight Deere Wiman's production of "The Damask Cheek," a gentle but beguiling new comedy by John van Druten and Lloyd Morris laid in New York's sedate sixties of 1909.

The authors have spun their play out of the merest gossamer. It tells, with humor and understanding, the story of how Rhoda Meldrum, a rich respectable but plain Englishwoman over thirty, gets her man.

The technique then was less direct and more intricate than it is today. In 1909, when Frances Starr was shocking the theatre-going public as the unconventional actress in "The Easiest Way," the business of being a lady in a man-made world was a job that required plenty of maneuvering and considerable finesse.

A young woman of good family had but one mission in life—finding a husband, and since convention demanded that she sit meekly by until some suitable male sought her out, the plight of a lady lacking in what Hollywood today calls "oomph" was distressing indeed.

Before, During and After the Ball

Rhoda Meldrum in "The Damask Cheek" is in love with her cousin, Jimmy Randall, but Jimmy is engaged to an actress, and Rhoda is having a grim time as a guest in the Randall home, presided over by her aunt, an intensely respectable widow of little sensibility who always says precisely what she thinks and never by any chance spares anybody's feeling.

The play transpires before, during and after a ball in the Randall home. Its first act does little more than introduce the household. The second, which could stand some cutting, develops a mild flirtation between Rhoda and Jimmy's best friend, and the third, best of the three, features a knock-down-and-drag-out fight between the Englishwoman and the actress, and brings the evening to a close in a cheerily satisfactory manner for nearly everyone concerned.

There is really very little of what is usually called plot in "The Damask Cheek"—the title, of course, is from Viola's love-sick speech in "Twelfth Night,"—but it is charmingly developed in a series of deftly written and beautifully played scenes. The pace, particularly in the somewhat overlong second act, is perhaps more suited to London than to New York, but Mr. van Druten has done an adroit piece of direction, and this reviewer found it almost constantly entertaining.

A Cast of Expert Players

The picture of the obtuse male who fails to see anything romantic about the woman he considers merely a good pal and a grand sport until she has "compromised" herself with another man is amusingly drawn. Flora Robson, an intelligent and warmly humorous actress, plays Rhoda with understanding and a sort of awkward charm that is sometimes a trifle heavy-footed in so light a play.

Myron McCormick is perfectly cast as Jimmy, the amiable cousin whose wild-oat sowing has been going on for years, while Margaret Douglass as his mother, the dowager Mrs. Randall, gives a performance so smartly tricked out with amusing detail that she all but runs away with the play whenever she is on the stage.

Celeste Holm as the actress Jimmy is on the verge of marrying is engagingly free and easy in the somewhat stuffy atmosphere of the Randall menage, and there are attractive performances by Joan Tetzel and Peter Fernandez as the younger and giddier Randalls and by Zachary Scott as the man-about-town who is intrigued by Rhoda's "mystery" and the fact that she was once presented at court. Ruth Vivian provides a touching portait of a lady who has descended in the social scale to the point of giving manicures to better-class patronesses as a means of earning her livelihood in a respectable manner.

Raymond Sovey's setting makes an admirable background for the play, and he has dressed the actors modishly in the rather alarming atrocities of the period.

A brochure included in the program advertises the appearance of Frances Starr in "The Easiest Way," and includes excerpts from the critics of the day. Since Mrs. Randall forbade her younger children to see it, they had, of course, hastened to do so at the earliest opportunity.

"The Damask Cheek"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 23, 1942

A Perfect Comedy At the Playhouse

By BURTON RASCOE

A PERFECT comedy, perfectly cast and perfectly presented opened at the Playhouse last night before an enthusiastic and distinguished audience for a run which, barring acts of God, is certain to be a long and happy one.

The play is The Damask Cheek. The authors are John van Druten and Lloyd Morris. Mr. van Druten sprang into the limelight in 1925 with a poignant and unforgettable study of adolescence entitled Young Woodley; Mr. Morris was formerly a New York drama critic and lecturer in English literature at Columbia, who has hitherto been chiefly known for his critical studies of E. A. Robinson and of the Irish poets and for his biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne. If the collaborators do no more, this play will be a monument to their writing partnership.

Mr. Dwight Deere Wiman, for whose taste and judgment New York theatergoers have come to entertain a profound respect, had the luck and sense to star that consummate actress, Miss Flora Robson; but his selection of the other members of the cast was flawless to the minor bit parts; and the direction of the play is so adult and finished that it stands out as a superb achievement.

The play is not great or significant in the stuffier sense; it is simply an enchanting study of human relationships, wherein the complications arise over the difference between inner emotions and the outward display of attitudes. Everything about the play is true and real—at least artistically; you believe in the characters and the authors permit you to see them as they never (or rarely) see themselves; therein you have that high comedy which is closely akin to tragedy. Indeed, it is because the comic mood is sustained throughout on an elevated plane, never descending into farce or over-emphasis, that the audience is kept aware that what is amusing in the play is also close to heartbreaking.

• • •

The play has to do with a middle-aged and repressed English spinster who is sent to America to live with her aunt in the hope of finding a husband. The title of the play is from Twelfth Night in the quotation which supplies the motive of the play:

DUKE: And what's her history?
VIOLA: A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek; she pined in thought.
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

She is secretly in love with her second cousin, whom she has known since they both were children; and her cousin, who treats her as a confidante, with an unconsciously cruel condescension and misappraisal of her virtues, has reached middle-age without ever having grown up emotionally and fancies himself in love with a slightly tarnished young woman who might really have been good for him if only he had been less bound by convention than at heart he really is. But the spinster, homely and sedate as she is, has feminine resources far greater than has the young tinseled baggage whom men make passes at and whom she exploits, a part sympathetically portrayed by Miss Celeste Holm.

• • •

There is a secondary love story in the play—that of the adolescent girl for a Don Juan much older than herself; and this story is beautifully depicted with that fine sense of the blindness of youth at which Mr. van Druten is so adept. In the role of the love-sick girl Joan Tetzel gives a performance that deserves the highest praise; she is fresh and lovely to look upon and her grief becomes your grief even when you are tempted to smile at it. Peter Fernandez also plays an adolescent role with sympathy and conviction. In fact, so perfect is each member of the cast in his or her part that it is almost invidious to call special attention to the work of any one of them. Nevertheless I cannot refrain from saying that Miss Margaret Douglass, as the imperious matriarch, carried off a difficult role (because it would have been so easy to overplay it) with high honors.

This play should be on your must list if you care much for the theater.

NEW YORK SUN
October 23, 1942

'The Damask Cheek,' a Slight Deft Comedy, Is Offered at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "The Damask Cheek," which opened last evening at the Playhouse, John Van Druten and Lloyd Morris write deftly about practically nothing, putting their trust in graceful wit. Miss Flora Robson and the engaging oddities of the year 1909. This trust is reasonably repaid; they achieve charm and comedy and a play which is literate and at ease. If it is also entirely conventional and perhaps a little tenuous, there is always expert acting to fall back on.

Delightfully expert acting is what Miss Robson, Myron McCormick, Margaret Douglass and Celeste Holm, among others, give their pretty fable. Miss Robson is a young-ish Englishwoman, described by others as a "nice quiet girl." She comes to New York in 1909 and visits an aunt, with everybody a little hoping that she may find herself a man. Mr. McCormick is a cousin she has known since childhood and gently loved for years, but he is involved with a pretty actress. He, you will understand, looks upon his cousin as a sister. It is not until she takes an unconventional hansom ride through Central Park with a handsome roue that he recognizes his true feelings, escapes his actress, provides comedy's happy ending.

Well, a pretty little play may be made even out of that one. The authors—who manage to sound very much like Mr. Van Druten—vary it just enough. Their dialogue, quick and subtle and, when the need arises, witty, gives what is almost distinction to characters which are almost paper dolls. The lady from England is no sweet victim. She is well salted and nicely seasoned. The aunt is no lay figure, the decayed gentlewoman who visits the scene is out of life, the youngsters of the family are spontaneous and gay, even the handsome philanderer wears his roue with a difference. They are all charming people—the sort who live in life's matinees.

For an act and a half these engaging folk are quite enough. Except for some lively scenes—notably a tussle between two of the ladies—the last half of "The Damask Cheek" suffers from story famine. It lapses into a series of duets, which is never a healthy sign. It takes a little longer than it should to reach its inevitable conclusions.

But you probably will not mind too much, considering what Miss Robson and the others do for it. You would never dream, if you remember her chiefly from "Ladies in Retirement," how deliciously amusing Miss Robson can be. Miss Douglass is as charmingly deft; Mr. McCormick is effortlessly funny and convincing. Miss Holm, although she may burlesque just a little, is always languidly comic; the other actors, and all the little touches of setting and costume and direction, add gentle delight.

You could hardly, indeed, ask for more charm. You could hardly, on the whole, have less substance and still have three acts.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 23, 1942

A Pleasant Evening

By HOWARD BARNES

A VINTAGE comedy of manners has come to the Playhouse to remind one that there is a place in the theater for charm, literate writing and beguiling characterizations. "The Damask Cheek" has these qualities in good measure. That they will make the new John van Druten-Lloyd Morris comedy a rousing hit seems very unlikely, but you can't dismiss them lightly. With its pleasant plot about a minor romantic flurry of 1909, engaging performances by Flora Robson and her assistants and casually correct staging, this Dwight Deere Wiman production affords an amusing evening's entertainment.

• • •

Lord knows the subject matter is infinitely remote at the moment. It takes several scenes of the play to establish the mood and conventions of its period. Once you accept them, however, the chances are that the piece will engage your attention gently but firmly. It is that sort of an offering. To my mind it is far more amusing and artful than the bulk of rather random presentations which have come to town this season.

• • •

The authors have made no slightest effort to give their work profound meaning or any of the overtones which have a way of creeping into supposedly escapist shows. They merely contemplate a group of people whom it might have been fun to know as the first decade of the century was coming to a close. Certainly the young Englishwoman who is played by Miss Robson was somebody. So were the crotchety matron of a house in the East Sixties, her not-too-knowing son and the actress who almost gets him in her clutches before the English girl arrives on the scene.

• • •

Nothing of great import happens to these people, but they talk amusingly as they work out their small destinies. Van Druten knows how to write theatrically. He has added some deft directorial touches in his new contribution to stage doings. Since the settings and costumes are up to the top standard of the Wiman office, the show is good looking as well as disarming. Do not expect anything of dramatic urgency in "The Damask Cheek" and you are likely to have a good time at it.

• • •

Miss Robson is not too aptly cast as the rich young visitor from abroad, who understands a stuffy New York scene better than its inhabitants. Her unerring feeling for high comedy, though, makes her portrayal vivid and delightful. She even engages in a rough-house battle with the errant actress which is a masterpiece of its kind. Myron McCormick is fine as the slow-witted hero, and Margaret Douglass is perfect as the domineering matron. Then there are Ruth Vivian, Celeste Holm and Joan Tetzel adding the quietly authoritative performances that a comedy of manners demands. "The Damask Cheek" is mild theater, but engaging.

"The Damask Cheek"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 23, 1942

Flora Robson Stars in a Literate and Amusing Comedy of Manners

By JOHN ANDERSON

BY TOYING amiably with the strict social conventions of New York in the year 1909 John van Druten and Lloyd Morris have written a literate and leisurely comedy of manners which Dwight Deere Wiman presented last night in the Playhouse with Flora Robson as its star. As a quietly amusing frolic in the family album it has its virtues along with the relish of some well-drawn characters. But it seems remote and fragile and without much substance—like a trinket on a what-not, airless and under glass, untouched and untouching.

Though their tone is at times gently satiric the authors' chief concern is the story of a Manhattan youth of the well-to-do East Sixties. He is engaged to an actress, to the genteel horror of his mother, but he discovers, after three placid acts, enlivened for a few eventful moments by one of the best hair-pulling scenes I have ever witnessed, that he really loves his rather unattractive English cousin.

It is she who gives the play its central character and its title for, like Viola in "Twelfth Night," she "never told her love, but let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, feed on her damask cheek. . . ."

Gets Her Man

In the comedy at the Playhouse the worm turns, but not the other cheek, for she buys the actress off for $30,000 and so captures, with suitable displays of modesty, the coveted male. And he happily discovers that he had taken her too long for granted, and had, in a sort of brotherly affection, known her too well to realize he was in love with her.

On a higher level this is something like the musical comedy dodge of having the heroine go through a couple of scenes in sloppy clothes and wearing spectacles only to have her appear suddenly in a dandy dress and without glasses to knock the hero dead in his tracks.

To achieve this effect Miss Robson is, perhaps, not the ideal choice for the part. She is a superb actress and she gives a remarkable performance, smouldering and powerful. She scrupulously clinches the point that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and so honestly carries out the intent of the authors. But the surface contrast that ought to enhance the laughter is lacking, suggesting that she is too true to be good for the play.

For the rest the authors engage themselves heavily in the atmosphere and the social customs of the period, the talk about that daring play "The Easiest Way" and Mr. Wells' new novel, "Ann Veronica." They get some pleasant amusement out of the sex taboos of the time, and their finest job is the creation of a turn-of-the-century dowager who is wonderful in her gift for unconscious insult. As done with unfailing and delightful accuracy and a sly sense of mockery by Margaret Douglass the portrait of Mrs. Randall provides the most amusing points of the play.

Fine Production

As usual Mr. Wiman has not stinted himself in giving the comedy a fastidious and handsome production. Myron McCormick is excellent at the lightly cynical comedy of the young man uncertain of his love, and Celeste Holm is equally good as the blowsy young actress. oan Tetzel and Peter Fernandez take care of the younger generation admirably, and Zachary Scott provides a suitably 1909 wolf. Mr. Sovey's single setting suggests just the right atmosphere without making it obtrusive.

Mr. van Druten's direction has a co-author's indulgence, and could profit by more variety in timing, just as the script itself could be improved by cutting.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 23, 1942

'The Damask Cheek' Romantic Comedy of a Snobby New York

"The Damask Cheek," comedy by John Van Druten and Lloyd Morris. Produced by Dwight Deere Wiman at the Playhouse, New York, Oct. 20, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

BEING a superb character actress it is quite natural that Flora Robson should want to test her matured art on a romantic role. And being a fine young character actor it is reasonable that Myron McCormick should welcome the idea of playing opposite her.

So that is what we get in "The Damask Cheek" at the Playhouse. Miss Robson is expending a generous amount of artistic skill on the part of a 30-year-old English spinster.

Mr. McCormick is playing the 30-year-old New Yorker who discovers her attractions after he has got himself engaged to Celeste Holm.

John Van Druten and Lloyd Morris are the authors. Mr. Van Druten also directed the play. He functions agreeably in both departments. "The Damask Cheek" at least gives you a complete evening in the theatre without so much as a shade of reference to wars, past or current.

This, I have an idea, will prove a welcome temporary relief to many playgoers. Women especially.

Rhoda From London

The slightly belated, and therefore doubly obvious, romance in "The Damask Cheek" is that of Rhoda Meldrum. Rhoda, having missed what the family decides is her chance of matrimony at home, despite her sterling qualities and a sizable income, comes on a visit to her Aunt Lucy in New York.

This would be in 1909. Which was the year Eugene Walter's "The Easiest Way" was a great Francese Starr-David Belasco success.

On this side Rhoda renews a pleasant acquaintance with her cousin, Jimmy Randall, with whom she had played games at home when both were quite young. Jimmy is about to marry Calla Longstreth, a pretty bad actress.

Rhoda is made inwardly miserable because she is losing Jimmy, and outwardly resentful and a little disgusted because her Aunt Lucy is a snob. She acts up on occasion, and finally goes riding at night around Central Park with a he-flirt and is duly compromised.

The Theatre Touch

The clearing twists of plot that follow stem from the theatre and not from life, even in 1909. But they are too trivial to matter greatly.

Miss Robson and Mr. McCormick, as intimated, play Rhoda and Jimmy with a kind of desperate heartiness, as though determined to prove that no acting job is really beyond them.

Miss Robson has many fine moments, without ever quite convincing you that she believes in what she is pretending to believe. The comedy impulse is not natural to her. Yet she can lose dignity with enthusiasm when she is forced into a hair-pulling fight.

Miss Holm is a bit obvious as the actress. Margaret Douglass is excellent as the snob. Joan Tetzel and Peter Fernandez play a couple of likable adolescents who discover life and sex in "The Easiest Way." Zachary Scott seemed a plausible man about East 60th St., and Ruth Vivian and Mary Michael contributed a couple of nice bits.

Raymond Sovey did the attractive setting and the 1909 costumes. Last night's audience expressed a lively and appreciative interest in the play.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 23, 1942

Broadway Gets a Touch of Wit

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MR. VAN DRUTEN'S new play proceeds for two acts as a graceful and witty comedy of manners before it crumbles, in Act III, into mere women's matinee stuff. In the same way, the first two acts are pleasantly leisurely, while the third act is awkward, roundabout and slow. All in all, however, the good things far outweigh the bad, even though they do not outlast them.

The Damask Cheek is a period play, laid in New York in 1909. It tells of a plain-looking but lively and characterful English girl of good family who is visiting her American relatives. She always has been in love with her cousin Jimmy—who is engaged to a pert little actress on the make—but, as the "damask cheek" quotation from *Twelfth Night* would imply, "she never told her love." At a dance a dashing young man about town gives her a whirl and brings to the surface her capacity for deep feeling. But the feeling remains fixed upon her cousin, and Mr. van Druten is forced to stutter through his third act for it to find a resting place there.

* * *

It becomes easier to observe the virtues and weaknesses of *The Damask Cheek* once one notes how it transfers, across a hundred years, the precise world of Jane Austen. The plot has many striking points in common with the plot of *Mansfield Park*; the heroine is a plainer Ann Elliot of *Persuasion*; and one can find counterparts for many of Mr. van Druten's other characters in one or another of Miss Austen's novels. This is to say no more, of course, than that Mr. van Druten follows, as he often has before, the classic line of the comedy of manners and sentiment. And at his best, he can etch a scene with much of Jane Austen's sharpness; he, like her, can score off snobs and fools and vulgarians; he, like her also, can create those ripples and eddies of talk which have a comic value.

But Mr. van Druten falls short of Jane Austen in many other things besides her genius. He lacks her insight into the human heart, so that his scenes of sentiment waver. He lacks her taste and discretion, so that the wrong kind of scene intrudes itself, or the right kind is too much prolonged. He lacks her creative power, so that his play drifts in places and turns at last into a series of draggy postscripts. He lacks her unsentimentality, so that his play seems to melt at the end into a romantic jelly.

As the heroine, Flora Robson has attempted a new kind of role, and comes off in it very successfully. She brings as much understanding to its gentler comic side as she brings spirit to its emotional one. Margaret Douglass gives an amusing performance in the rich role of the snobbish aunt; Myron McCormick is pleasant as the cousin, Joan Tetzel is winning as his pretty sister, and Celeste Holm is satisfactory as his actress-fiancee.

"The Time, the Place and the Girl"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
October 22, 1942

Joe Howard Revives a Musical Comedy of 1906

By BURTON RASCOE

JOE HOWARD was a seasoned performer when Chester A. Arthur was President and Lillian Russell was a new girl at Tony Pastor's; he was a celebrated song writer when Brooklyn Bridge was still in the blueprint stage and only the very rich could afford those new-fangled electric lights; he was a veteran of show business when the Waldorf Hotel was only a vague idea William Waldorf Astor had of annoying his cousins, the John Jacob Astors, and when 34th St. was 'way up town. Mr. Howard could have retired before the Russo-Japanese War, and he did retire, I believe, for a time before the last war. He wrote the music for The Time, the Place and the Girl and played in it 36 years ago.

Therefore, when he stepped before the footlights just before the final curtain of the revival at the Mansfield last night and began singing some of those songs he wrote which have been famous as far back as we can remember it seemed to some of us oldsters a minor miracle that a man of Mr. Howard's years should be so young in spirit; that a man of 78 could still be in such good voice and move with such jaunty grace. Because of Joe Howard and the warm, nostalgic glow his familiar songs induced in us, some of us were almost ready to forgive the general flatness of a totally uninspired production. But others were not so lenient; there were murmurs of discontent in an audience which had obviously come to cheer and remained to yawn. Not even the valiant efforts of Mr. Louis Katzman and his orchestra to get more out of the score than there was in it sufficed to give pace or brilliancy to a production which proved to be pre-Ziegfeld in more than time.

* * *

The fault, I fear, was largely that of Mr. William B. Friedlander, who staged the production and wrote the lyrics (every one of which seemed to depend upon the pronoun you and the meager rhymes for it) and who utterly failed to inspire in Mr. Red Marshal any enthusiasm for his job. Mr. Marshal is an old-time burlesque star who was so contemptuously bored by his role that he infected others around him. And that is a shame, for in a season when the strip tease has become the pelvis of musical comedy there should be room for such a show as The Time, the Place and the Girl must have been in 1906, when there was sweetness and sentiment and the girls in the chorus wore ankle-length skirts (as they did, for the most part, last night).

Lee Sullivan, a refreshing juvenile with a nice voice and a highly pleasing personality, and a quartet consisting of James Phillips, Wilson Lang, Fred Kuhnly and Robert Douglas did what they could to brighten up the show. Miss Vickie Cummings had the looks and assurance which gave to her brief bits something of the quality of an alarm clock periodically to wake up the audience. The specialty dancers, Kendrick Coy and William Weber, were spectacular in an acrobatic way; but there was no good dancing as we are accustomed to see dancing nowadays in more spirited company.

* * *

The plot is as negligible as musical comedy plots dare to be, but the scene, that of a sanitarium for the cure of drunkards, which is invaded by a bevy of schoolgirls and others who are there kept quarantined by an outbreak of measles, had comic possibilities which were not realized by comedy wherein the fun is supposed to come in when somebody is referred to as a "dastard" and when an eccentric dancer mimics the droolings of an imbecile.

The times do not seem propitious for revivals. And, besides, you can hear Mr. Howard on the radio. . . . Afterthought: The chorus was lovely—the girls of it, I mean.

NEW YORK POST
October 22, 1942

Revised Version of "The Time, the Place and the Girl"

By WILLELLA WALDORF

"THE quarantine's over, folks!" shouted Joe Howard as "The Time, the Place and the Girl" drew to a close last night at the Mansfield Theatre. It was welcome news indeed, for we had been sitting there for hours listening to dialogue like this:

"He thinks he's a dirty shirt."

"What did you do?"

"Oh, we took the starch out of him!"

"The Time, the Place and the Girl" sounds familiar and it should. It is the title of a popular musical comedy first produced in 1906 that toured for years. Last night's "revision" of the old hit tossed out the original score and substituted what was supposed to be a new one. The book was revamped.

"But," said a program note, "the authors have not attempted to make it into a modern musical comedy. While all the padding and most of the bromides of the gas-lit era have been deleted, the play is, nevertheless, presented as of that period, with costumes and scenery in vogue then."

Today's Bromides No Improvement

It is conceivable that a revival of an old musical comedy of the 1906 era, done as nearly as possible as it was then, might at least have had historic interest as a period piece. A revised version that makes use of the old song hits only in a nostalgic overture, and substitutes today's bromides for those of the gas-lit era is nothing but an embarrassing bore.

Modern cynics are fond of trumpeting the theory that the Good Old Days weren't really so very good after all, but we refuse to believe that "The Time, the Place and the Girl" in its original form could possibly have been as dismal or as inept as last night's new version at the Mansfield. Poor direction and limp jokes cannot be disguised by dressing them up in period costumes and calling them quaintly old-fashioned.

Joe Howard's music prepared for the new version often sounded hauntingly familiar, but some of it was tuneful. After all, Mr. Howard has written plenty of hits in his time, "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," for instance.

But far better tunes than Mr. Howard's would have been done in last night by the fancy lyrics attached to them, plus the persistent encores accorded everything regardless of applause or lack of it.

A Keeley Cure Sanitarium

Last week at "Beat the Band" some of George Marion Jr.'s song lyrics impressed us as self-consciously contrived, full of farfetched rhymes and elaborate playing on words. Mr. Marion, however, now seems almost a gifted poet, for we have just experienced the lyrical efforts of William B. Friedlander in "The Time, the Place and the Girl."

The "plot" last night at the Mansfield concerned the somewhat erratic goings-on at a Keeley Cure Sanitarium in the Virginia mountain country. The inmates, all in various stages of delirium tremens, constantly suffered from delusions. Nurses and keepers swarmed over the place, and the leading eccentric dancer was not only eccentric but downright balmy.

Then somebody came down with measles, and a number of policemen appeared. One naturally supposed they were there to stop the show. But no. They declared a quarantine and everybody was stuck for the duration. When we left, Mr. Howard, having lifted the ban, was swinging into his old song hits. But it was too late by that time to resuscitate "The Time, the Place and the Girl."

NEW YORK SUN
October 22, 1942

'The Time, the Place And the Girl' Opens at The Mansfield Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A STRIKINGLY peculiar musical called "The Time, the Place and the Girl" arrived last evening at the Mansfield Theater after an insufficient number of postponements. In it, an improbable project comes to a numbing fruition; in it all that must have been worst in the musical comedy of 1907 is transplanted to the shuddering theater of 1942. You would hardly believe that things such as this could happen.

Under the same title, a musical something like this languished in the early years of the century—languished and seemed to die. It was the work of Will M. Hough, Frank R. Adams and Joe Howard, and Mr. Howard also fabricated the music. It was not in that day a famous show and evidently it was not a good one. But someone, who perhaps got the idea out of a dream book, decided to dig it up. Will Morrissey and John Neff were called in to "revise" the book; Mr. Howard is reported to have "revamped" the music. William B. Friedlander wrote some new, faintly modern lyrics. Singers and actors, few of them widely known, were persuaded to appear in it. (One of them got away in the early stages, and Mr. Howard himself took over an almost inperceptible part.)

The story, which is incredible beyond description, is laid in the Keeley Cure Sanitarium in Virginia. There are incomprehensible love affairs, reported in abashing dialogue. At the end of the first act, the cast arrays itself in finery and sings, with blinding irrelevance, a ditty called "The Custom of Dressing for Dinner." At the beginning of the second act, the whole shebang is quarantined for measles. There is a ballet ornamented by an adagio dancer in a pink union suit. There is a young woman in the cast who used to be "the darling of the European music halls and cafes." There are a few wistful double entendres and the dullness of it all is beyond belief.

Mr. Howard's songs have a family resemblance which amounts, I fear, to inbreeding, although there is one maverick among them which reminds me strangely of "I Got Spurs." Coincidence, of course. The lyrics have a tendency to remind one of all the other lyrics in the world, without quite attaining the stature of burlesque. The whole thing is very odd, and discouraging.

"The Time, the Place and the Girl"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
October 22, 1942

'Time, Place and Girl' Goes Back Good Twenty-five Years

"The Time, the Place and the Girl," musical comedy based on a story by Will M. Hough and Frank R. Adams; music by Joe Howard; revised by Will Morrissey and John Neff. Produced by Georges D. Gersene at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Oct. 21, 1942.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

C'EST LE GUERRE! We may, or we may not, get a bombing from the air, but we must expect a series of theatre raids of one kind or another. The result of one of them was revealed at the Mansfield Theatre last night; a revival of "The Time, the Place and the Girl."

This piece was produced originally in Chicago in 1906 at a funny little second-story theatre called the La Salle. Someone was always producing a musical comedy at the La Salle in those days, and frequently it was two young writers recently graduated from the Chicago University, Will M. Hough and Frank R. Adams.

Joe Howard, a melodious minstrel of the time, wrote the scores for them, and the music was usually better than the books. This often happened then and frequently happens now.

"His Highness the Bey" was one of these early operas. "The Isle of Bong Bong" another. Sometimes they got as far East as New York. "The T, P and G" did. More often they just played the La Salle and quit.

A Mysterious Stranger

Why the producer of the current revival, Georges D. Gersene, decided to revive "The Time, the Place and the Girl" I wouldn't know. I suspect he met Mr. Howard, who has been singing at Billy Rose's "Diamond Horseshoe" these last several years, and I wouldn't be surprised if Joe told him it was good.

Or it may be Mr. G. knew Irene Hilda, who also comes from Paris, and thought she would fit nicely into the cast. Irene is the ingenue.

In any event, Mr. Gersene has provided a new set of costumes, skillfully reproduced by Paul du Pont in the styles of the period.

And a cast that can, and should, be described as well seasoned. Mr. Howard is himself a member, coming good-naturedly to the front in the second act and singing two of his most popular compositions—"I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now" and "Hello, My Baby," with cakewalk. Joe is a spry old bird for 70-odd.

Revision Downward

Will Morrissey and John Neff have tinkered with the lyrics and probably with the jokes. They are still pretty bad. The music, however, holds up, and a dancing ensemble is quick to tap its way into any emergency that may arise. A very good dancing ensemble when Ballerina Rae McGregor is leading it, with two young helpers.

The story of "The Time, the Place and the Girl" has to do with a day or two at a Keeley Institute, popular institutions in the old days when hard liquor was cheaper and delirium tremens more common.

Evelyn Case is the chief vocalist. Duke Norman the most agitated of the dancers. Vickie Cummings the unhappiest of the actors. No one has much of a chance.

'THE TIME, THE PLACE AND THE GIRL'

A musical comedy in two acts; book based upon a 1907 version by Will M. Hough, Frank R. Adams and Joe Howard; revised by Will Morrissey and John Neff; lyrics by William B. Friedlander; music by Joe Howard; setting by Amend; costumes by Paul duPont; staged by Mr. Friedlander; presented in the revised form at the Mansfield Theater on October 21, 1942, by Georges D. Gersene. The cast:

Mrs. Talcott	Evelyn Case
Molly Kelly	Vickie Cummings
Joe Howard	Joe Howard
A Guide	James Phillips
Tom Cunningham	Lee Sullivan
Johnny Hicks	Red Marshal
Mr. Duval	Rolfe Sedan
An Attendant	Fred Kuhnly
Lawrence Farnham	Richard Worth
Margaret Howard	Irene Hilda
Willie Talcott	Duke Norman
A Policeman	James Phillips
Ballerina	Rae McGregor

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 22, 1942

Musical Popular in 1906 Resurrected Minus Most Of Gas-lit Era Bromides

By JOHN ANDERSON

FOR reasons which seem simply ghoulish, a group of well-meaning but apparently morbid showmen have gone all the way back to 1906 and exhumed a highly deceased musical comedy called "The Time, the Place, and the Girl."

In a sort of face-lifted revision, the once popular musical ambled out onto the Mansfield stage last night with an embarrassing and elderly friskiness and there fell, it seemed to me, flat upon its bombazine.

Georges D. Gersene, the producer of record, explains in a program note that in raising the old hulk the authors "have not attempted to make it into a modern musical comedy."

"While all of the padding and most of the bromides of the gas-lit era have been deleted," he says, "the play is nevertheless presented as of that period, with costumes and scenery in vogue then."

I copied down some of the little gems of wit which have been left in, presumably on the theory that they are not gas-lit, though they seemed dimmed out.

"I've got a mind as sharp as a whip," says a roguishly comical fellow.

Whip's Connection

"That's funny," says the girl, with an impish air of snapping her garters. "I always connected a whip with the hind end of a horse!"

"Why are they taking him off that way?" asks Miss Fun, pointing to a fellow being dragged off stage backwards.

"Oh," says the second rib-breaker, "he doesn't care where he's going. He only wants to see where he's been."

That's the way it went all evening, touch and go, mostly go. Unlike the character with the quaint interest in looking backwards, I have no wish to remind myself where I was last night between 8:45 and 11 o'clock.

But duty calls. Viewed in the sober midst of 1942 Broadway, viewed even in the midst of several modern idiot entertainments, this resurrection has the effect of a peculiarly unpleasant hallucination.

If Mr. Barnes, Miss Waldorf, Mr. Kronenberger and Mr. Nathan had not all assured me that they were seeing the same thing, I would have summoned a strait-jacket in the belief that I had lost my mind.

Archaic Silliness

It is difficult to suggest the air of archaic silliness the show evokes. Its coy songs with modern allusions, its peg-top dialogue, its pitiful attempts at period humor, stamp it hopelessly as one of those spurious semi-antiques that probably wasn't much good when it was new. It has the deadly aroma of a lethal vintage—something like drinking carbolic acid out of a slipper.

It is sung and acted by a cast which seems to have learned its art under a faculty of department store dummies. The veteran Joe Howard, who wrote the music and took part in the original production, is on hand, and Vickie Cummings, Red Marshal and Lee Sullivan plainly deserve a better fate.

Irene Hilda, who makes her Broadway debut was acclaimed, at the age of ten, "The Shirley Temple of Paris," according to the playbill, which adds that after the collapse of France she "entertained under the watchful and suspicious eyes of the dreaded Gestapo."

It is pleasant to assume that the Gestapo employs no drama critics.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 22, 1942

Lavender and Old Mothballs

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF YOU, like me, think of the 1900s as a romantic age—when one rolled away from the theater in a hansom cab and had supper and champagne under shaded lights at Rector's—better stay away from *The Time, the Place and the Girl*. Better stay away from it in any case. For this queer choice in the way of revivals is not simply disenchanting about the past, but fairly disturbing taken all by itself. It is a museum piece that has been indiscreetly displayed in a shop window. It is a lady long past her bloom who skittishly persists in trying to seem young.

The Time, The Place and The Girl was doubtless a very agreeable musical comedy in its day, but there is nothing enduring about its music and nothing even endurable about its book. It has not grown old gracefully. It has gathered dust without gathering glamour. The present production, moreover, is a clumsy hybrid which offers modernized lyrics and some new-fangled gags while seeking to preserve the period quality of the piece. As a result, the whole thing is as lacking in style as it is in sprightliness.

* * *

Laid, of all places, in a Virginia sanitarium where alcoholics of a bygone day took the famous Keeley Cure, *The Time, The Place and The Girl* is heavy with goo-goo-eyed romances and fluffy-ruffled ladies who dance in a half-agitated, half-simpering fashion, and sing about how love is just a will-o'-the-wisp. The jokes go about like this: "Did you graduate from college?"—"No, I quit after five years"—which makes one tremble to think about the "bromides of the gas-lit era" that the management claims to have deleted. Worst of all, the show gets practically no help from the cast, whose acting technique is about the same vintage as the play. The whole thing seems to have been not so much revived as exhumed.

Late in the evening Old Timer Joe Howard, who wrote the music for the show, came out and sang some of his other old songs, including *I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now*. It was the nearest thing to a redeeming touch that the evening had to offer.

"The Time, the Place and the Girl"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
October 22, 1942

A Shabby Relic

By HOWARD BARNES

THIS seems to be the season for dusting off old shows. At the Mansfield, if you hurry, you will find a musical comedy relic. "The Time, the Place and the Girl," with its merry-making about dypsomania and its sentimental ditties, may have been hot stuff at the beginning of the century. In its current revival it is not even quaintly funny. The book has supposedly been revised, but it couldn't have been worse in the first place. As for the performances, most of them warrant no better material than there is at hand.

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About the only kind thing that may be said for this Georges D. Gersene production is the fact that some of the period costume ensembles are rather fetching. Only a very dull designer could have muffed this chance. And it takes more than dancing girls in Edwardian get-ups to make a musical comedy click even faintly. "The Time, the Place and the Girl" doesn't begin to click. When it is not downright embarrassing, it is incredibly dull.

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The veteran Joe Howard, who had a hand in the original show, is featured in the revival. He has rough going until he just forgets about the proceedings at the finish and sings some songs. The vocalists certainly get the best breaks at the Mansfield. Evelyn Case and Vickie Cummings deliver several ballads pleasantly enough. The same can't be said for the coy clowning and crooning of Irene Hilda, who is supposed to have been "The Shirley Temple of Paris." Her posturing exaggerates every awkward aspect of the antique.

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As for the other players, they do what they can with random bits of business and specialty numbers. There are some enthusiastic singers who would be all right if they didn't choose to call themselves The Sophisti-kids. Duke Norman executes agile taps and Rae McGregor makes an adagio act as painless as possible. The sponsor of the production would have one believe that "all the padding and most of the bromides of the gas-lit era have been deleted" from his revival. It might have been better had he kept them in.

NEW YORK TIMES
October 22, 1942

No Place for Time and Girl

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVER since 1907 New York has been getting on very happily without a production of "The Time, the Place and the Girl." In retrospect that looks like one of the most celestial periods in New York history. For "The Time, the Place and the Girl" was revived at the Mansfield last evening, with Joe Howard, one of the original authors, flashing his teeth at the audience, and a whole stageful of more moderately aged performers wearing vintage costumes and behaving coyly to music.

Your increasingly durable correspondent did not catch "The Time, the Place and the Girl" when it first introduced the Keeley cure to stage literature in 1907. But another member of the staff hopped over to Wallack's and reported that the chatter was "on the whole uncommonly dull." Although some modern scholars of song and jest have revised the original book and poetry, the dullness seems now to have permeated the entire production and has at last overtaken the dancing and scenery.

There is a spot of animation in the orchestra pit. The drummer is a rhapsodic artist who operates the drums, traps, cymbals, whistles and other percussion gadgets at very high speed, flashing a stick now and then over his head, rolling and swaying with the rhythms and watching the conductor with poignant devotion. He is giving a vivid performance, perhaps under the impression that he is working for "Beat the Band." But he is the only man in the production who is not bent on proving that this is no time for the place and the girl. "The Prince of Pilsen," in which a drunk man in full dress fell into a fountain, was always a much funnier show. But don't start reviving it, now. Let bad enough alone.

"Bird in Hand"

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE
October 20, 1942

Cold Mutton

By HOWARD BARNES

SOMETHING more sturdy than John Drinkwater's "Bird in Hand" might have been chosen to launch a series of revivals at the Morosco. The mere fact that the play ran for well over a year on Broadway a dozen years ago does not keep it from being very cold mutton at the moment. The reverse English conceit of having a pub proprietor objecting strenuously to his daughter's marriage with a man above her station was not very funny originally as I remember it. In this year of our Lord, it creaks.

Perhaps there are those with a bent toward dramatic research who will find all sorts of illuminating aspects in "Bird in Hand." Certainly the comedy has been given a brisk presentation and is performed by some able and willing actors. The acid test for a resurrection such as this is whether or not it is entertaining. To my mind, it is an interminable bore. Revivals generally have an air of quaintness about them, no matter how tough the original material may have seemed. This one is quaint beyond measure.

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You may or may not remember that Drinkwater was concerned with social problems in his play. Getting in the full swim of that vanished liberal tradition of the late 20s, he set out to show that the commoner was capable of as much pride and snobbery as the squire of the manor. In addition, he grouped a representative lot of Gloucestershire people on the stage to give his work the pretensions of a comedy of manners. Neither as a social document, nor a farce about human foibles, does "Bird in Hand" stand up very well today.

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The current production is not to blame for the tedium of this offering. Ronald T. Hammond, who means to bring "a series of established Broadway plays" to the boards, has wisely cut the Drinkwater script and staged it for laughs. He has engaged such stalwart players as Romney Brent, Viola Roache and Nicholas Joy to capture the fugitive British accents of the farce. Harry Irvine plays the obstinate pub owner who prides himself on knowing his place, and Frances Reid and Herbert Patterson make a likable romantic couple. The play's at fault in this revival. When that's the case, there isn't much that can be done about it.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 20, 1942

Drinkwater's Bird Is No Phoenix

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AS I DID not see *Bird in Hand* when it was first produced on Broadway a decade or so ago, I cannot say why it ran for a good deal more than a year. Perhaps the production was a very magnificent one. Or possibly there were no other shows running just then. But whatever the reason, I am afraid it has completely vanished.

Bird in Hand is not, to be sure, anything to become at all violent about. It is a harmless little comedy, with here and there some pleasantly, whimsical and mildly amusing lines. It burbles and bumbles, and ripples and rambles, making much ado about nothing in the least important. The trouble is that after a while it comes to seem unusually silly. And very soon after that, it begins to seem extraordinarily dull.

The whole thing has to do with the romance between an English innkeeper's daughter and the neighboring squire's son. Seldom in literature has the course of true love ever run smoother—or would it have, at any rate, had not the innkeeper, a man of stubborn pride and immitigable snobbery, objected to his daughter marrying above her station. This plebeian prejudice manages to block the young couple's passage to the altar for three long acts, and also enables some assorted guests at the inn—a suave barrister, a flippant young fellow, and a Cockney sardine salesman, to take an active part in the crisis and sprinkle it with some incidental comedy.

No doubt John Drinkwater intended *Bird in Hand* to serve, in its whimsical fashion, as a modest satire on English class distinction; if so, then one can only say that there is such a thing as being too modest.

The production is somewhat hit or miss; the cast, indeed, has gone in rather freely for misremembering its lines. Harry Irvine takes the part of the innkeeper with massive seriousness, in the style of an old-time heavy. But Harry Sothern and Romney Brent are bright and amusing as two of the guests, and Nicholas Joy is smooth as the third of them. But *Bird in Hand* remains a pretty pointless play to revive.

"Bird in Hand"

NEW YORK SUN
October 20, 1942

'Bird in Hand,' Pleasant Comedy, Is Revived at The Morosco Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JOHN DRINKWATER'S "Bird in Hand," which first came to New York in the long-ago spring of 1929, was revived last evening at the Morosco by Ronald T. Hammond, who hopes it will be the first of a series of revivals. Perhaps it will, too, since Mr. Hammond knows where to find good actors and has a fortunate memory for pleasant plays. "Bird in Hand" is pleasant—a happy, peaceful little play about the familiar problems of youth and age.

Mr. Drinkwater took none of his problems too seriously, you may remember. He wrote of amiable people who might on occasion bark, but were fairly certain not to bite. The owner of the Gloucestershire inn from which the comedy takes its name barked violently when his daughter became emotionally entangled with the son of the local squire. Loudly he lamented the changing ways. Sternly he set his face against any trifling with the rules of caste, and when the youngsters would not listen he chased them through the night, roaring imprecations. It took an expansive K. C., and a young man of liberal notions and a comical fellow who traveled in sardines to set it all right. Comes back to you now, perhaps?

It is a gentle play, humorous rather than witty, and easy enough to forget in a dozen years. But it has charm and gayety and Mr. Drinkwater wrote appreciatively of his typical characters. The years have not dated it precisely. They have made it seem to come from another world—from a more reasonable and kindlier world. Played with zest, as it is at the Morosco, it is oddly refreshing. It provides relaxation and an opportunity to laugh again at foibles. And if the last act dwindles away a little repetitiously, this hardly matters. A certain carelessness becomes drama which grew up in an untroubled world.

Mr. Hammond has employed Nicholas Joy, Romney Brent, Harry Sothern, Harry Irvine and some others and more or less given them their heads. This has worked out nicely, on the whole. Mr. Brent's humor is slyly telling; Mr. Joy has a fine, suave time with the part of Ambrose Godolphin, K. C. Mr. Sothern, overcoming tribulations—he managed somehow to cut his finger rather badly in the middle of things—is delightfully funny. Mr. Irvine is gruffy, sometimes vigorously, persuasive as the innkeeper, and Frances Reid, Viola Roache, J. W. Austin and Harry Barnard are all charming and expert.

Mr. Hammond might have directed more firmly here and there, pulling the production together and keeping his actors in hand. A few more rehearsals might conceivably have helped. But things are, on the whole, perfectly all right as they are.

'BIRD IN HAND'

A comedy in three acts, by John Drinkwater, directed by Ronald T. Hammond, sets by Holak Studios; revived at the Morosco Theater on October 19, 1942, by Mr. Hammond. The cast:

Joan Greenleaf	Frances Reid
Alice Greenleaf	Viola Roache
Thomas Greenleaf	Harry Irvine
Gerald Arnwood	Henry Barnard
Mr. Blanquet	Harry Sothern
Cyril Beverly	Romney Brent
Ambrose Godolphin, K. C.	Nicholas Joy
Sir Robert Arnwood	J. W. Austin
Barmaid	Elizabeth Sutton

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
October 20, 1942

'Bird in Hand' Opens At Morosco Theatre

By JOHN ANDERSON

SOMEWHERE around the world's last bright April Fool's day, which is to say April 4, 1929, the Booth Theatre opened its doors on a chatty, amiable, and I thought gently tiresome little comedy by John Drinkwater called "Bird in Hand." I reported explicitly the next day all its deliberate coyness, its air of careful charm, and its second act horseplay, verging on a pillow fight, and the result of all my simple warnings was that the play ran 500 performances.

This experience should prompt me to deal severely with its revival at the Morosco last night by praising it to the skies. But I cannot. Even at the risk of setting it off on another run of 500 performances I am obliged to report that, on second inspection, thirteen and a half years later, "Bird In Hand" is still a gently tiresome little comedy. The chief difference now is that it is not only pointless, but that it seems to belong to a remote, lost world, and that, with two or three exceptions, it isn't very well played.

Even back in the innocent waywardness of 1929 it seemed peculiarly quaint, and irrelevant, and I always have accepted its long run as evidence that in the Stock Market crash that Autumn, people lost not only their money but their minds.

Mr. Drinkwater takes three leisurely acts to convince a stubborn English innkeeper that his daughter is good enough to marry the son of a baronet. It is the innkeeper's yeoman though snobbish notion that everyone belongs to a certain class and should stick to it, and should not, by any means, marry above or below it.

Three oddly assorted guests at the inn join in the family argument, and wrangle among themselves. A middle-aged K. C. and a transient squirt enliven the conversation with a pajama romp that seems like a pat-a-cake for grown ups. They are forced to share the same room, I must explain, by the violence of a storm which sounded to me as if the boys backstage at the Morosco were surrendering the theatre's thunder sheets, not without a struggle, to the nation's scrap collectors. I, for one, would be willing to do without stage storms for the duration.

At the end of three acts Father Innkeeper gives in. He is tricked by sly old Sir Robert into a furious outburst against anyone who says his daughter isn't good enough to marry anybody, proving, I suppose, that paternal pride will triumph even over an innkeeper's snobbery. I am only sorry, to quote the immortal words of Groucho Marx, that the question ever came up.

Mr. Drinkwater's dialogue has certain graces of its own, and a mildly flavorsome humor. Nicholas Joy and Romney Brent emerge with most of the acting honors, the former as a pompous K. C. and the latter as a mischievous chatterbox. Both excellent comedians, they manage to suggest that things are going to be much, much funnier at almost any moment, and even in the face of the final curtain.

It is not their fault, but Mr. Drinkwater's, that the promise is never fulfilled. Viola Roache makes the most of the flimsy part of the mother; Harry Sothern gets some obvious laughs as the woebegone sardine salesman, and Harry Irvine deprives the play of whatever comic force it might get from a suitably belligerent innkeeper by playing the part with a sort of smothered ineffectuality.

Ronald T. Hammond, who directed, announces that this is the first of a series of revivals. At the present stingy exchange I am obliged to look forward to two in the bush.

NEW YORK POST
October 20, 1942

Drinkwater's "Bird in Hand" Revived at the Morosco

By WLLELLA WALDORF

RONALD T. HAMMOND opened a series of "established Broadway plays" at the Morosco Theatre last night with a revival of John Drinkwater's English comedy, "Bird in Hand," which astonished a number of people when it was first imported some thirteen years ago by running well over a year.

Mr. Hammond's idea, apparently, is to establish a Broadway stock company playing at moderate prices, and it is, no doubt, a worthy venture. Unfortunately, last night's premiere not only had to bear up under a last-minute cast change, but the production suffered from sundry time-honored afflictions often associated with stock company presentations.

Several of the actors who were not last-minute additions stumbled over their lines, and a general air of insufficient rehearsal haunted the stage. The off-stage noises featured some very tinny thunder and a dash of sleezy rain-on-the-windowpane. The lighting seemed a trifle uncertain. All that was lacking to complete the illusion of a barn-storming stock troupe working under difficulties in the hinterland was the impromptu appearance of a cat on the stage.

Under the circumstances, it was impossible to tell whether "Bird in Hand" still has Broadway appeal or not, for the pacing of the comedy was naturally extremely uneven and the prompter must be hoarse today.

Marrying Off the Innkeeper's Daughter

Even allowing for the vicissitudes, however, we are inclined to think that Mr. Drinkwater's comedy is a little mild and out-of-date for revival at this time. Gently amusing as it is at times, the story of a stubborn British innkeeper who won't have his daughter marrying above her station, and the interest taken in the matter by three gentlemen staying overnight, seems remarkably inconsequential today.

Despite the general air of uncertainty, Nicholas Joy and Romney Brent, as the two gentlemen reluctantly sharing a room at the Bird in Hand Inn, managed to wax fairly merry in the second act. Harry Sothern was sometimes touchingly comic as the sardine salesman who belonged to the Conservative party, and Frances Reid gave an attractive performance as the innkeeper's daughter. Harry Irvine blustered convincingly as the father of good yeoman stock who believed in keeping to his own class, and Viola Roache was helpful as the wife he married out of a circus.

Herbert Patterson was the unhappy young man who took over Henry Barnard's role at the last minute when Mr. Barnard retired from the part, suffering from a foot infection.

On the whole, it appears that Mr. Hammond will have to do better than this if he is to make anything very vital of his projected series of established Broadway plays. He may be charging less than the customary rates, but the Morosco Theatre has a reputation for housing well turned out Broadway productions. This is no time to lower its standards.